1960

HOBART

HISTORY

Pioneer days of old Lake County . . .

3-10-60

Did 'coffee break' originate in Hobart?

By Sally Remaley

Lake County has boasted many "firsts" and many "one and onlys" down through the years of its fabulous history, but one of the most unusual was the community central heating plant invented and used for several years by early merchants of Hobart.

During the long severe winter of 1847, shortly after Hobart was founded, it became increasingly more and more difficult to stretch out the supply of fuel until spring. The snows were so deep that chopping up timber, which was plentiful, became almost impossible.

THE MERCHANTS were especially hard hit. One of them came up with the idea of pooling their firewood, coal, cobs and everything else that would burn, in a king-size underground furnace with tunnels reaching to each little shop of the small "downtown" district.

Like most completely new ideas, this one met with ridicule at first. But the storeowners were, by this time, so cold they were willing to try anything. Together they set to work digging the tunnels and the furnace pit and smoke channels.

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IT WAS a gigantic task, but with all the tools and strength they possessed, they completed the project and surprisingly enough it was successful.

The tunnels carried the heat to each store. It was the first known "central heating" plant and for a time was quite a topic conversation.

WORD of Hobart's "crazy idea" even reached the east and was discussed in high government circles. Meanwhile, it was working out fine in Hobart.

In the summer, too, it was useful, shopowners soon found out.

When they wanted to slip away from the store for a "coffee break," they could pop down the tunnel. come out in the village tavern, enjoy a few glasses of ale, and go back to work, without anyone seeing them leave their stores.

As "newfangled" stoves and furnaces came on the market, and the Hobart stores changed hands, were torn down or remodeled, the tunnels were eventually covered up and forgotten.

About ten years ago when some excavation was going on in the basement of an East Third St. Hobart building, the remains of one of the old tunnels were uncovered, still in good condition, then covered with cement, to lie hidden for a future generation to discover again.